

Mark Twain
and the German Language

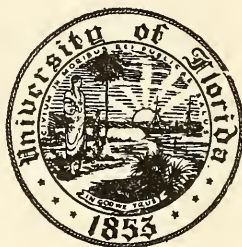
By JOHN T. KRUMPELMANN

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDIES

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John T. Krumpelmann



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MARK TWAIN AND THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

According to W. D. Howells, Mark Twain knew German "pretty well."¹ Twain's "The Awful German Language" displays considerable knowledge of German grammar. He read "many German books"² and attended sessions of the Austrian Parliament³ and performances at German theaters⁴ and operas.⁵ His comedy Meisterschaft exhibits him as a writer of German prose. In A Tramp Abroad⁶ he translates Heinrich Heine's "Lorelei" into English verse. Later he tries his hand at "translating some German plays"⁷ and even enters into active collaboration to produce German comedies.⁸ Encouraged by his bilingual oration in Heidelberg,⁹ he addresses in German an assembly of Viennese journalists.¹⁰ How well, then, could this American who dined with Wilhelm II, corresponded with Carmen Sylva, enjoyed the personal acquaintance of Franz Josef and many members of the Imperial families of both Austria and Germany, as well as that of numerous artists, writers, and other important personages in both Germanic empires, read, understand, speak, and write German?

As a boy of about fifteen Mark attempted, with meager success, to study German under the tutelage of a German shoemaker slightly acquainted with English.¹¹ A few years later (1855-56) he gave instruction in music to a German apprentice.¹² About 1860 he resolved to study French, German, and Italian in a school of languages. After the first two or three lessons he "concluded that for the present French" alone "would do.--He. . .bought textbooks."¹³ These early efforts produced no apparent results.

For a long time he displayed no further interest in German.¹⁴ In 1874 his young daughter Susy had a German nursemaid from whom the whole family probably learned some of the language,¹⁵ but it was not until the beginning of 1878 that the entire family began to immerse themselves in German. Albert Bigelow Paine asserts:¹⁶

The German language became one of the interests of the Clemens home during the early months of 1878. . . . They entered into the study. . . with an enthusiasm and perseverance that insured progress. There was a German nurse for the children, and the whole atmosphere of the household presently became lingually Teutonic. It amused Mark Twain, . . . but he was a good student; he

acquired a working knowledge of the language in an extraordinarily brief time. . . . He would never become a German scholar, but his vocabulary and use of picturesque phrases, particularly those that combined English and German words, were often really startling, not only for their humor, but for their expressiveness.

The Clemens family, with the German nursemaid, sailed for Hamburg on the Holsatia on April 11, 1878. Aboard were Bayard Taylor, the newly appointed American Minister to Berlin, his wife, and daughter, all three well versed in German.¹⁷ The passage afforded Twain an excellent opportunity to learn German under expert tutelage.¹⁸

What was the quality of Twain's "working knowledge" when he arrived in Germany? In his first letter he exclaims to W. D. Howells:¹⁹ "How charmed I am when I overhear a German word which I understand." He reports further: "From the day we reached German soil, we have required Rosa (the nurse) to speak German to the children--which they hate with all their souls." He quotes Susy as asking:²⁰ "Papa wie viel uhr [sic!] ist es?" On May 26 he tells the same friend how he found a "Moblirte [sic!] Wohnung zu Vermiethen."

Twain settled in Heidelberg and "the struggle with the 'awful German language' went on."²¹ "It was a general hand-to-hand contest. . . . To Clemens it became a sort of nightmare."²² He "dreamed all bad foreigners went to German heaven; couldn't talk, and wished they had gone to the other place." He wished he could hear himself "talk German." Shortly after his arrival Twain wrote to Bayard Taylor, producing this firsthand example of his ability (or inability) to write German.²³

Lieber Herr Taylor!

Wir ~~h~~ werden hier bleiben vielleicht für drei Monate, zum Schloss-Hotel. . . . Dies hotel steht about fünf und siebenzig Fuss höher als das Schloss, und commandirt ein Aussicht welcher ohne Ähnlichkeit in der Welt ~~i~~ hat. (Sie müssen excuse auskratchens, interlinations, u.s.w.)

Ich habe heute gecalled on der Herr Professor Ihne, qui est die Professor von Englishen Zunge im University to get him to recommend ein Deutchen Lehrer für mich, ~~w~~ welcher he did. Er sprach von mehrerer Americanischer authors, und meist günstiger &

vergnügungsvoll von Ihrer; dass er knew you und Ihrer ~~Rufen~~ Lebe so wohl, durch Ihrer geschreibungen; und wann Ich habe gesagt Ich sollen Ihr ~~schreiben~~ schreiben heute Nacht gewesen if nothing happened, er bitte mich Opfer sein compliments, und hoffe Ihnen will ihm besuchen wenn du kommst an Heidelberg. Er war ein vortrefflicher und liebenswürdiger & every way delightful alte gentleman.

Man sagt Ich muss ein Pass (in der English Passport) haben to decken accidents. Dafür gefelligt Ihnen furnish me one. Meine Beschreibung ist vollenden: Geborn 1835; 5 Fuss 8 1/2 inches hoch; weight doch aber about 145 pfund, sometimes ein wenig unter, somteimes ein wenig oben; dunkel braun Haar und rhotos Moustache, full ~~f/c/e/~~ Gesicht mit sehr hohe Oren und leicht grau ~~pract~~ practvolles ~~str~~ strahlenden Augen und ein Verdammtes gut moral character. Handlungkeit, Author von Bücher

Ich habe das Deutsche Sprache gelernt und bin ein glücklicher kind, you bet.

.

Sincerely

S. L. Clemens

The writing of this letter probably suggested to Twain that he had "made a great mistake in not thinking to deliver a very bad German speech, every other sentence pieced out with English, at the Bayard Taylor banquet in New York,"²⁴ and prompted the Heidelberg oration delivered before the Anglo-American Club of students on July 4, 1878. This speech, a mixture of English and German, shows little, if any, progress in German since the writing of the letter.

Abundant evidence indicates that the Clemens family continued to struggle courageously with the idiom during the remainder of their stay in German lands.²⁵ On the tenth of June, Twain again wrote to Taylor:²⁶

Lieber Herr Taylor!

(Don't know

whether it ought to be Herr or Herrn)

.

I talk the most hopeless and unimprovable German with the family (in der Wirthaus). . . . It is a sehr schönes Aussicht up there. . . .

Ich habe der Consul Smith gesprochen ein Paar Wochen ago, & told him about the Pass, und er hat mir gesagt das er wurde be absent from this Gegen--(something) zwei oder drei Wochen, aber wann er sollte hier wieder nachkommen, wollte er der Pass geschlagen worden & snake it off to Berlin. Vielleicht hat er noch nicht zu Mannheim zurüchkehrt.

Now as to the Grammar of this language: I haven't conquered the Accusative Case yet (I began with that) & there are 3 more. It begins to seem to me that I have got to try to get along with the Accusative alone & leave the rest of this grammar to be tackled in the future life.

Twain was beginning to lose hope. He probably discontinued his formal study of grammar when he started his tramp with the Reverend Joseph H. Twichell.²⁷ A Tramp Abroad, the result of these rovings, written largely in Heidelberg and Munich,²⁸ contains much helpful information, but one must be careful to distinguish fact from fiction. Appendices A, B, C, and D doubtless date from the Heidelberg days (approximately May 6 to August 1), when Twain studied grammar. In writing Appendix D, "The Awful German Language," he certainly kept an open grammar directly before his eyes. At this time his mastery of the grammar was not masterly, his vocabulary was small, his "Sprachgefühl" only incipient. It was still a task to translate even simple German. In the first chapter of the Tramp he introduces several Rhine legends copied directly from an English translation,²⁹ but in Chapter XVI, while still quoting from Garnham, he places in juxtaposition to the latter's translation of Heine's "Lorelei" his own original metrical rendition. He admits that his translation may not be a good one, but feels confident that it will serve its purpose, viz.: "to give to the un-German girl a jingle of words to hang the tune on." In this he has succeeded better than Garnham.

Mark Twain was really acquiring an ability to read German. Whereas his translations of the inscriptions found on the walls of the student prison in Heidelberg (A Tramp Abroad, Appendix C) were made with the help of a friend,³⁰ the following appendix ("The Awful German Language") gives us samples of independent

translation³¹ and indications that he was attempting to read German books and newspapers.³² He informs us that "Quite indifferent students of German can read Fritz Reuter's charming platt-Deutsch tales with some facility."³³ He exhibits some acquaintance with Black Forest stories and Berthold Auerbach's novels.³⁴ He had reason to feel "well satisfied with" his "progress in the German language."³⁵

With the spoken word he made less progress. On June 10 he asserted that he spoke "the most hopeless German."³⁶ In search of the Heidelberg University prison he makes inquiries in English because: "I had stopped afflicting people with my German."³⁷ The reason for this decision is not difficult to discover. When he attempted to give directions to two German strangers "in the most elaborate and correct German he could muster, one of them lifted his eyes and murmured: 'Gott im Himmel!'"³⁸ When he visited the Heidelberg castle, he tells us:³⁹ "I surprised the keeper. . . with my German. I spoke entirely in that language. He was greatly interested; and after I had talked a while he said my German was very rare, possibly a 'unique'; and wanted to add it to his museum."

When he was riding in a railroad compartment (about August 7),⁴⁰ a German entered with his two daughters. Twain relates:⁴¹ "I spoke in German to one of the latter several times, but without result. Finally she said: 'Ich verstehe nur Deutch [sic!] und Englishe.'" In the same compartment occurred another amusing incident related in A Tramp Abroad.⁴² I quote it from an unpublished letter:⁴³ "Rev. Twichell. . . conceived a pretty correct average of my German. When I was talking in my native tongue, about some rather private matters in hearing of some Germans one day, Twichell said, 'Speak in German, Mark, . . . some of these people may understand English.'" On the return trip Twain represents himself as endeavoring to converse with a boatman. "I suppose I must have spoken High German, -- Court German, -- I intended it for that, anyway, -- so he did not understand me. I turned and twisted my question around and about, trying to strike that man's average, but failed. He could not make out what I wanted. . . . I spoke the purest German, but I might as well have spoken the purest Choctaw."⁴⁴

But Mark Twain continued to afflict the natives with his German and thereby reaped some benefit. Before his final departure from Heidelberg he writes:⁴⁵ "Stopped at the 'Pflug' to drink beer, and saw that pretty girl again at a distance. Her father, mother and two brothers received me like an ancient customer and sat down and talked as long as I had any German left." At last Twain was beginning to be able to converse in German with auditors who were humble and patient. Indeed, his German was not fluent.

Two weeks later (about August 21) he admits that he speaks "broken German" and that he had taken a courier to the bank "to do the translating."⁴⁶

Nevertheless, he could understand German well enough to follow a conversation. At the University prison in Heidelberg he understood enough to comprehend the import of the discourse between his guide and the keeper.⁴⁷ His confession, "We went down to Mannheim to see King Lear played in German. It was a mistake. We. . . never understood anything but the thunder and lightning,"⁴⁸ can hardly be literally true, even though attendant circumstances may have rendered his comprehension almost nil. He also attended a performance of Lohengrin. He understood the conversation of the people who sat in front of him even "though he understood nothing that was uttered on the distant stage."⁴⁹ Although Twain now understood some spoken German, we need not take at face value the first part of his statement:⁵⁰ "I can understand German as well as the maniac that invented it, but I talk it best through an interpreter."

While touring through the Black Forest and German Switzerland in August, Mark Twain had plenteous opportunity to practice the vernacular, but formal study was suspended. He wrote to Taylor from the Hotel de l'Ecu de Genève on September 8, 1878:⁵¹ "I have learned the German language & forgotten it again: so I resume English once more." But lest the "forgotten" be taken too literally, he adds: "One of these days I am going to whet up my German again & take a run to Berlin, & have a talk with you in that fine old tongue." After settling in Munich in November, Twain found it none too easy to return to routine study. On the first of December he writes:⁵² "I cannot work and study German at the same time; so I have dropped the latter, and do not even read the language, except in the morning papers to get the news." Two weeks later he informs Bayard Taylor:⁵³

Our little children talk German as glibly as they do English now, but the rest of us are mighty poor German scholars. . . . Many a time when teacher and dictionaries fail to unravel knotty paragraphs, we wish we could fly to you for succor; we even go so far as to believe that you can read a German newspaper & understand it; & in moments of deep irritation I have been provoked into expressing the opinion that you are the only foreigner except God who can do that thing. I would not rob you of your food or your clothes or your umbrella, but if I caught your German out, I would take it. But I don't study anymore. — — I have given it up.

The article "German Journals,"⁵⁴ probably written at this time in Munich, suggests, however, that Twain was devoting much attention to journalistic German.

Despite repeated assertions that he had ceased studying German while in Munich and was confining himself to reading the newspapers, Twain had not abandoned his exercise in the spoken idiom. His landlady "and her two young children used to drop in every morning and talk German to me--by request."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, he was still hesitant about conversing at length with strangers. Recording a conversation with a fellow lodger he says:⁵⁶ "I opened up in cast-iron German; he responded in quite flexible English; thereafter we gave the German language a permanent rest."

On December 14, 1878, Mark Twain wrote:⁵⁷ "We are going to try to run over to Berlin in the Spring." The death of Bayard Taylor on December 19 resulted in abandonment of this plan. The Clemens family left Germany the following February. Before departing, Twain wrote to Twichell:⁵⁸ "I went to Europe for three purposes. . .the third to acquire a critical knowledge of the German language. My MS.already shows. . .that I am moving about as an Artist and a Philologist." Thus ends Twain's first hand-to-hand encounter with the "Awful German Language."

After his return to America he continued to show some interest in German. Professor Albert W. Aron has pointed out⁵⁹ that "the language of the Mark Twain household after their return from Germany was bilingual. At least for a number of years both German and English were spoken." This is corroborated by Katy Leary, the Irish maid in the Clemens family:⁶⁰ "I understood quite a little before I went to Europe, because in Hartford, the children never spoke English in the nursery -- they always spoke German, 'cause Mrs. Clemens wanted them to be able to talk it before they got over there; and once little Jean undertook to give me lessons in German. I really learned a great deal from her." It seems likely that the children spoke more German than the father in this household.⁶¹

In the short story Mrs. McWilliams and the Lightning (1880)⁶² the entire comedy of the situation arises from a half-knowledge of German. The German is correct and the passages were undoubtedly copied directly from some book in Twain's possession. The author still makes fun of the difficulties of that language. In Life on the Mississippi,⁶³ Twain quotes from "chapter vii of" a "book just published in Leipzig, Mississippi-Fahrten, von Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg." He thus demonstrates his ability as a translator. About this time (1884) Twain introduced a few German expressions into his letters to Howells.⁶⁴

From Susy's biography, begun in 1885, we learn that Twain was in close contact with German during that year. Susy relates:⁶⁵ "Mama. . . teaches Jean German reading from 9-10; reads German with me from 10-11. . . after she has retired she reads and studdies [sic] German for a while." Susy accompanied her father to Vassar College on May 1, 1885. While in New York, she reports:⁶⁶ "We went to a German bookstore and bought some German books for Clara's birthday." Mark Twain purchased some roses for his wife. "We saw that it (the card) was written on in papa's handwriting, it was written in German 'Liebes Geshchenck [sic!] on die Mamma.'" The father interpolates:⁶⁷ "I am sure I didn't say 'on'--that is Susy's spelling, not mine." From the Poughkeepsie depot to the college⁶⁸ "papa and I had a nice long time to discuss and laugh over German profanity. One of the German phrases papa particularly enjoys is 'O heilige maria Mutter Jesus!' Jean has a German nurse, and this is one of her phrases, there was a time when Jean exclaimed 'Ach Gott!' to every little trifle." The father tells us of this nurse: "She was just from Germany, and knew no English. She was always scattering her profanities around, and they were such a satisfaction to me. . . . To the children the little maid's profanities sounded natural and proper and right because they had been used to that kind of talk in Germany." Also in 1885, Twain wrote a poem Kiditchin, which contains a few German words,⁶⁹ a stunt intended to amuse his juveniles.

In A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1886-89) Mark Twain, still mindful of his German studies, considers the "awful German language" a thing to conjure with.⁷⁰

Professor Aron informs us that "during the years '85, '86, '87, a German class or club met at regular intervals at the Mark Twain home and studied German."⁷¹ Albert Bigelow Paine correctly restricts these activities to 1886-87.⁷² The club "had monthly conversation days, when they discussed in German all sorts of things, real and imaginary,"⁷³ and Twain took an active part. His three-act comedy Meisterschaft, written in a mixture of English and German, was published in January, 1888,⁷⁴ after it had been given twice by the class or club "with enormous success."⁷⁵ On the manuscript Twain wrote: "There is some tolerably rancid German here and there in the piece. It is attributable to the proof-reader."⁷⁶ But we know that "rancid German" was Twain's own brand. Strangely enough, the German in the comedy, although not free from errors, is of a much better quality than we had a right to expect from Mark Twain. Of course the mechanical, conversational phrases are copied from the Meisterschaft text;⁷⁷ but the correctness of the passages not traceable to the text, and especially of the lines spoken by Gretchen, leads us to suspect that other members of

the club, particularly Professor Schleutter,⁷⁸ contributed in some degree to the improvement of the German.

The summer of 1891 found the Clemens family in Europe again. They visited Bayreuth, for the Wagner festival, Marienbad, Nürnberg, and Heidelberg. From October until March, 1892, they were in Berlin. The following summer Twain spent a short time in Bad Nauheim and Frankfurt. In the summer of 1893 he was in Munich and other parts of southern and eastern German territory for a few weeks.⁷⁹ His second German period, often interspersed with trips to America, ended in August, 1893.

On August 2, 1891, Twain, still encountering difficulty in translating, attempting to read in a musical magazine a letter written by Theodor Uhlig [?],⁸⁰ comments: "Uhlig says Wagner despised 'Jene plapperude [sic!] musik' and therefore 'runs, trills, and schnorkel are discarded by him.' I don't know what a schnorkel is." "And if I understand Uhlig's elaborate German. . . ."⁸¹

The following remark by his daughter affords some idea of Mark Twain's command of German in the autumn of 1891:⁸² "Father started to speak a few words in German but either the language or the looks of the caller discouraged him. He stopped short in the middle of his sentence and lapsed into silence." Even as late as February, 1892, Twain was vainly striving to understand German newspapers.⁸³ "[I] read the debates and get excited over them, though don't versteh. Don't know what a 'Schelgesetzentwurf'⁸⁴ is, but I keep as excited over it and as worried about it as if it were my own child. I simply live on the Sch.; it is my daily bread. I read all the debates on that question [the öffentliche Militärgericht]' with a never-failing interest, but all at once they sprung a vote on me a couple of days ago & did something by a vote of 100 to 143, but I couldn't find out what it was." But the article "The Cholera Epidemic in Hamburg" shows that he had made some progress in reading German journals before the end of the ensuing summer.⁸⁵

Mark Twain could positively read and translate simple German. "Soon after his arrival in Berlin" he "came across the old nursery book Struwelpeter, and began its translation into English."⁸⁶ Clara tells us:⁸⁷ "Frequently he brought the old German non-sense rhymes called Struwelpeter to the lunch table and read them aloud with great emphasis. Even now, I recollect how he laughed each time when he came to the lines

Am Brunnen Stand ein grosser Hund
Trank Wasser dort mit seinen [sic] Mund.

He finished his translation, but perhaps it did not satisfy him, for the project never went any further."⁸⁸

Likewise, in Berlin (1891-92) Twain "laboriously translated" one of his stories into German "with some idea of publishing it," but the German version was suppressed due to his wife's objection to the nature of the story.⁸⁹ The inadequacy of Twain's German prose probably contributed to this decision. An excerpt from Following the Equator (1896-97) is indicative. He quotes from a fictitious diary of a German:⁹⁰ "Per consequenz der Kriegeserklärungen, reise ich heute nach Deutschland ab, auf dass ich mein Leben auf dem Altar meines Landes legen mag." This Twain calls, in all seriousness, "as clean native German as anybody can put on paper."

This second period exhibits no evidence of progress in spoken German. English was largely the medium of converse. When Twain dined with Wilhelm II, "his Majesty chatted briskly and entertainingly along in easy and flowing English."⁹¹

Mark Twain's next sojourn in German lands, extending from July, 1897, to the end of May, 1899, constitutes his last and most ambitious German period. The first summer was spent at Weggis, Switzerland. In September he proceeded to Vienna, where he remained until almost the end of May, 1899. Evidently, he had "whet up" his German in anticipation of this visit. The testimony of Katy Leary is interesting and seemingly reliable. She reports:⁹² "I didn't have much trouble with the German language while we was [sic] in Vienna. I used to speak a little before I went to Germany. Mr. Clemens used to write a whole page for me every day in German--questions and answers to them--and that's how I picked up a great deal more. I really studied it that way. I could speak it very good then. I used to tell him about lots of things he wanted to know, and they used to wonder how I got on so well."

Evidently Twain tried his oral German on the villagers of Weggis. He "formed the acquaintance of a number of native residents, and enjoyed talking to them about their business and daily affairs."⁹³

In Vienna he was reluctant to converse in German with educated people. The morning after his arrival he went with his daughter to arrange for her study under Leschetitzky. The pianist "tried to stutter a few English words" but failed. Clara adds:⁹⁴

When the two gentlemen had grown tired of their crippled means of communication, Leschetitzky suddenly addressed me. . . . Father said: "Herr Professor, my daughter can speak some German. It is the only thing she does a little better than I do. Speak up, Clara, and show how well you can talk this savage language." . . . Poor Father had to listen to

a long speech addressed by Leschetitzky to him. . . .
 I saw Father's face drop more and more as this German cataclysm fell upon him, and finally he nervously repeated a few times "Ich versteh, Ich versteh," believing if he stated he understood, Leschetitzky might think he really did and cease talking. [Twain took his leave] after a great deal of cordial handshaking, which took the place of conversation.

Clara informs us further: "One of the noted Viennese writers, Pötzl, called on Father and was able to speak a little English, so Father was always glad to see him and glean information that would be hard for a foreigner to learn from reading German newspapers." To continue with Clara's exposition: "Father read German very well and had moods when he could command his tongue to utter many of the words he had memorized. At other times he would make no attempt to speak anything but English, and, if Viennese ladies and gentlemen called who were unable to speak anything but German, great misunderstandings took place as to what the topic of conversation really was."

The following from a letter written after he had been a month in Vienna again betrays his predicament:⁹⁵ "There is much politics agoing, and it would be interesting, if a body could get the hang of it. . . .And there's more politics. . . .I wish I could understand these quarrels, but of course I can't." Nevertheless, a few days later (October 28) Twain witnessed the tumultuous scene in the Parliament which he described so masterfully in his article "Stirring Times in Austria." We must conclude that he received some assistance in collecting the data for this article. He could not have understood the proceedings so well himself. The Wiener Neue Freie Presse of November 5, 1897, reports of the occasion: "Mark Twain war. . . obwohl er natürlich auch das nicht verstand, was aus dem allgemeinen Geschrei auf der Gallerie vernehmbar war, . . . doch ganz Aug' und Ohr."

Mark Twain's ability to converse in German increased slowly. He writes on March 24, 1898:⁹⁶ "Mr. Kleinberg came. . . last night, and brought an English-speaking secretary." Clara tells us:⁹⁷ "Every now and then a newspaper reporter who was able to talk a little English appealed to Father for an interview." Early in 1898 Mark Twain went to call on Countess Bardi. His wife went along "only to help Mr. C. with my bad German."⁹⁸ While Mr. and Mrs. Clemens "wait each for the other to explain their presence in a few good German words, the Countess addresses them in perfect English."⁹⁹ A month later Twain admitted in a public lecture: "I have not sufficiently mastered German to allow my using it with

impunity."¹⁰⁰ After the outbreak of the Spanish-American War he engaged in an argument. "As the conversation was in German, Father could not express all that was in his heart, but when words were lacking, eyes and hands finished the speech."¹⁰¹ Invited to visit the sister of the German emperor, Mark Twain told the lackey "in halting German that he would come at the appointed hour and then coughed several times until the servant had disappeared."¹⁰² Finally, before quitting Vienna, Twain called on the Emperor Franz Josef to pay his respects. "He had compacted a sort of speech into a single German sentence of eighteen words."¹⁰³ Although he worked hard and thus "prepared himself a little for what he wanted to say,"¹⁰⁴ he did not use his speech; the Emperor spoke English.¹⁰⁵

During the second winter in Vienna (1898-99) Mark Twain's inability to handle German with facility resulted in the failure of his plan to produce one or more comedies for the Burg Theater. He collaborated with Siegmund Schlesinger, a Viennese journalist and successful playwright, on two comedies to be called "Die Goldgräberin" and "The Rival Candidates." Several scenes of the first-named comedy were completed despite slow progress. "Schlesinger spoke very little English, and Clemens always had difficulty in comprehending rapid-fire German. . . . Interest died, and they good-naturedly agreed that it would be necessary to wait until they understood each other's language more perfectly before they could go on with the project."¹⁰⁶

Despite his apparent inability to master oral German, Mark Twain delivered a successful speech in German before the Vienna Press Club -- Concordia -- as early as October 31, 1897.¹⁰⁷ The Neues Wiener Tageblatt refers to it as "an impromptu speech by Mark Twain in the German language, which it is true he has not fully mastered, but which he controls sufficiently well to make it difficult to detect any harsh foreign accent."¹⁰⁸ Evidently, this report occasioned, in the volume of Mark Twain's Speeches, after the words "Entschuldigen Sie. . . dass ich verlese, was ich Ihnen sagen will," the remark "(Er las aber nicht, Anm.d. Ref.)."¹⁰⁹

To anyone familiar with Twain's capacity to use German, both the newspaper report and the editorial note are highly suspect.¹¹⁰ Twain was definitely invited "to make a speech in German" and he accepted.¹¹¹ The Wiener Neue Freie Presse¹¹² informs us that after speaking a couple of sentences in German, "Hier nahm Mark Twain, der das Deutsche zwar ziemlich correct, jedoch mit starkem englischem Accent spricht, ein Manuscript aus der Tasche und fuhr fort: 'Entschuldigen Sie, dass ich verlese, was ich Ihnen sagen will.'" Twain had probably memorized the first sentences.¹¹³ Certainly, he had carefully prepared and written out the entire speech. It is amazing that he could write such good German. Although not always

grammatically and idiomatically correct, the composition is not only respectable but praiseworthy. It represents an enormous advance from the Heidelberg speech and the German letters to Bayard Taylor written twenty years earlier. It is reasonable to assume that Twain had, as was ever his wont, submitted this composition to his family for criticism and editing.¹¹⁴ Be that as it may, the speech is his own, even down to such minutiae as "du liebe Zeit"; "können, mögen, dürfen, sollen," etc. Clara Clemens seems to agree with the report in the Neue Freie Presse. The "friends who accompanied" her father "to the banquet," she relates,¹¹⁵ "said that they had never heard a crowd of men laugh harder than at his struggle with that foreign language." The Neues Wiener Tageblatt informs us:¹¹⁶ "At times he would interrupt himself in English and ask, with a stuttering smile, 'How do you call this word in German' or 'I only know that in mother-tongue.'"

Mark Twain's knowledge of German was improving. It is said that he "did some translating of German plays" in the summer of 1898.¹¹⁷ To quote Albert Bigelow Paine: "Once he wrote that he had translated 'In Purgatory' and sent it to Charles Frohman, who pronounced it 'all jabber and no play.'"¹¹⁸ Twain objects: "Curious too, for it tears these Austrians to pieces with laughter. When I read it, now, it seems entirely silly; but when I see it on the stage it is exceedingly funny."¹¹⁹ Evidently Twain had seen and read this play several times before translating it. Unfortunately, we have no record of the present whereabouts of the manuscript.

Previous to the summer of 1898, Mark Twain witnessed the performance of Adolf Wilbrandt's Meister von Palmyra in the Burg Theater.¹²⁰ Deeply impressed, he studied the play thoroughly and wrote a laudatory appreciation, "About Play-Acting,"¹²¹ which contains a few lines translated from the German play. On December 29, 1898, he saw that drama again on the same stage and enjoyed it as much as ever. We note again the progress of that same American who in 1878 attended a performance of King Lear in Mannheim and, according to his own confession, "understood nothing but the thunder and lightning."¹²²

Apparently Mark Twain read a considerable amount of German while in Vienna.¹²³ The exact extent of his reading is not definitely known. From "The Memorable Assassination"¹²⁴ (written in the autumn of 1898) we learn that he was familiar with Baron Alfred von Berger's "recent fairy drama Habsburg," for the article closes with a passage (nine uneven verses) translated from that play, introduced thus: "I cannot make a close translation of it, but I will try to convey the spirit of the verses."

Although Twain numbered among his personal friends several authors, notably Eduard Pötzl, Wilbrandt, and Carmen Sylva, we

doubt whether he read much in German literature, and share the skepticism evinced by Schönmeyer.¹²⁵ "Paine, Mark Twain's Biograph, schrieb an den Verfasser: 'Natürlich (!) hatte er Schopenhauer gelesen. . . er las sehr viel, während er in Deutschland und Oesterreich war. Ohne Zweifel waren ihm auch die Werke Wilhelm Busch vertraut.'" He writes on April 6, 1899:¹²⁶ "I have been reading the morning paper. I do it every morning." His Vienna journal was the Neue Freie Presse.¹²⁷ Yet, he had written twenty years earlier:¹²⁸ "I think to learn to read and understand a German newspaper is a thing which must always remain an impossibility to a foreigner."

When Mark Twain left German territory (May, 1899) he could read even journalistic German with facility. He could understand the spoken word with little difficulty. He could, if in a mood to try and if given time to shape his phrases, speak simple German haltingly, and probably ungrammatically. He could even write German prose, which, although not flawless, was good and commendable. In the latter task he probably availed himself of the censorship of the members of his household. Finally, there is some indication that his association with German was beginning to affect his English style. In Vienna (1899) he began his work on Christian Science, the first sentence of which is almost half a page in length. Twain says: "That sentence is Germanic, and shows that I am acquiring that sort of mastery of the art and spirit of the language which enables a man to travel all day in one sentence without changing cars."¹²⁹

This represents the high-water mark of Twain's attainments in German. He never visited Germany again. His interest in the language now begins to fade. After May, 1899, we still find traces of his former interest, but even these soon melt into ghostly shadows.

Certain German expressions had become household fixtures in the Clemens family.¹³⁰ We do not know whether Twain tried his German on Prince Henry of Prussia at the mayor's dinner in New York in February, 1902, but we are told that the Prince "sought him out, and was most cordially and humanly attentive during a considerable portion of the evening."¹³¹

On the occasion of his sixty-seventh birthday (1902) he jests thus about the uncertainty of his command of German. "I was trying to explain to St. Peter, and was doing it in the German tongue, because I didn't want to be too explicit."¹³² In his essay, "Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?," published in April, 1902,¹³³ he quotes briefly from reminiscences written by Carmen Sylva.¹³⁴ As late as 1909 he addresses his daughter as Clärchen,¹³⁵ but such sporadic incidents are mere dying echoes. After returning from Italy with the remains of his wife and selecting as the inscription

for the marker at her grave (July, 1904)

Gott sei dir gnädig, O meine Wonne!¹³⁶

he never again traveled on the Continent nor showed any further real interest in German. In fact, he rapidly forgot what German he had learned. Thus, he testifies on March 7, 1909, speaking of the "profanities" of his little German nursemaid:¹³⁷ "It grieves me that I have forgotten those vigorous remarks. I long hoarded them in my memory as a treasure. But I remember one of them still, because I heard it so many times. . . 'Gott sei Dank! Ich bin schon fertig mit'm Gott verdammtes [sic] Haar!' (I believe I am not quite brave enough to translate it.)"

Although Mark Twain did finally acquire "a working knowledge of the language,"¹³⁸ he did not do it in "an extraordinarily brief time." That he never became a "German scholar"¹³⁹ like his friend Bayard Taylor was due in part to his method of study, which he criticizes thus in his article "Taming a Bicycle," probably about 1885:¹⁴⁰

It is not like studying German, where you can mull along, in a groping, uncertain way, for thirty years; and at last, just as you think you've got it, they spring the subjunctive on you, and there you are. No-- and I see now plainly enough, that the great pity about the German language is, that you can't fall off and hurt yourself. There is nothing like that feature to make you attend strictly to business. But I also see, by what I have learned of bicycling, that the right and only way to learn German is by the bicycling method. That is to say, take a grip on one villainy of it at a time, and learn it--not ease up and shirk to the next, leaving that one half learned.

Finally, mention should be made of Twain's fondness for noting and manufacturing long German words.¹⁴¹ The beginnings of this inclination are found in A Tramp Abroad. Apparently the pygmies presented there caused Carl von Thaler to think that he could outdo Mark Twain and to offer a "Monstrum" of sixty-one letters.¹⁴² But Thaler was far behind the American. Already on February 2, 1898, Twain had added to his collection Hottentotenstrottelmutterattentäterlattengitterwetterkotterbeutelratte (seventy letters).¹⁴³ Speaking in Vienna on March 10, 1899, Mark Twain presented what is probably the last word in monstrosities. He said:¹⁴⁴ "My collection of fourteen-syllable German words is still

incomplete. But I have added to that collection a jewel--a veritable jewel. I found it in a telegram from Linz, and it contains ninety-five letters: Personaleinkommensteuerschätzungskommissionsmitgliedreisekostenrechnungsergänzungsrevisionsfund.

"If I could get a similar word engraved upon my tombstone I should sleep beneath it in peace."

FOOTNOTES

1. My Mark Twain (New York, 1910), 17.
2. Friedrich Schönnemann, Mark Twain als Literarische Persönlichkeit (Jena, 1925), 38.
3. The Writings of Mark Twain, 37 vols. (Stormfield ed.; New York, 1929), XXXII, 1050. Hereinafter cited as Mark Twain's Works.
4. Friedrich Schönnemann, "Mark Twain and Adolf Wilbrandt," Modern Language Notes, XXXIV (1919), 372 f. Cf. also A Tramp Abroad, Chap. IX.
5. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 922; Mark Twain, "At the Shrine of St. Wagner," What is Man? and other Essays (New York, 1917); Mary Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain (New York, 1925), 113 ff.; A Tramp Abroad, Chap. X.
6. Mark Twain's Works, IX, 124 f.
7. Ibid., XXXII, 1071, 1074 f.
8. Ibid., 1075.
9. A Tramp Abroad, Appendix D.
10. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1049.
11. Ibid., XXX, 82.
12. Ibid., 107.
13. Ibid., 151.
14. Professor Albert W. Aron (Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, Jahrbuch, 1925, p. 67) says Roughing It (1871) (Mark Twain's Works, III, IV) makes it "quite clear that Mark Twain had engaged in a serious tussle with Ollendorff's German Grammar." Twain writes in that work (III, 209): "a gentleman named Ollendorff--not the party who has inflicted so much suffering on the world with his wretched foreign grammars," etc. When Clemens joined the language school he probably bought the French, German, and Italian Ollendorff texts. Ollendorff was the Berlitz of that day. (See list of textbooks published by D. Appleton, New York and Philadelphia, 1847.) It was probably the French text with which Twain struggled. (See above and Mark Twain's Works, XXX, 151.) In his pilot days Twain had reason to be interested in French because of his frequent visits to New Orleans.

The "mention in Roughing It (IV, 66) of a storekeeper by the name of Klopstock can only be explained by its identity with that of the author of the Messias" (Aron, Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, 67 ff.). German names occur frequently in Roughing It (e.g., Hurtzal, p. 63; Dallinger, p. 86; Wagner, p. 100; Hogadorn, p. 102; Conrad Weigand pp. 315, 325, 330), as did German characters in Mark Twain's West (cf. ibid., p. 35). The use of the name Klopstock no more implies knowledge of the Messias than Squire Hogadorn implies a knowledge of Klopstock's contemporary, Friedrich von Hagedorn.

Mark Twain's The Gilded Age (New York, 1873), contains as chapter heads mottoes in German from Heine (XIX), Körner (XXII), and Wieland (XXVIII), which are translated in the Appendices. This does not indicate Twain's knowledge of German. The Publisher's Note states that the mottoes were selected and translated by "the late J. Hammond Trumbull,

- LL.D., L.H.D." See Mark Twain's Works, V, xxiii. Note also that Charles Dudley Warner wrote Chapters XIX and XXII of The Gilded Age (Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 477 f.)
15. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 509. Mark Twain was always on friendly terms with his domestics. Cf. infra, especially pp. 8, 10 f., 15.
 16. Mark Twain's Works, XXI, 616; XXXIV, 320.
 17. Cf. John T. Krumpelmann, "Bayard Taylor as a Literary Mediator between America and Germany" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1924).
 18. Cf. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 618.
 19. May 4, 1878, Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 328 f.
 20. Ibid., 329 ff.
 21. Cf. William Boyles, "Mark Twain Tramping Abroad," Germany and You (Berlin, 1931-43 ?), V (1935), No. 3, 21.
 22. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 621 f.
 23. Heidelberg, May 7, 1878, Cornell University Library. (Twain's letter is reproduced exactly, including struck-through letters.) Cf. John Richie Schultz, "New Letters of Mark Twain," American Literature (1936), VIII, 47 ff.
 24. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 331. The banquet was held on April 4, 1878. The Heidelberg oration is appended to "The Awful German Language" in A Tramp Abroad, Appendix D.
 25. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 662 f.; XXXIV, 333.
 26. Cornell University Library. Cf. John Richie Schultz, "New Letters of Mark Twain," loc. cit.
 27. Cf. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 623. N.B: Paine mentions this just before the July 4 speech.
 28. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIII, 1678.
 29. F. J. Kiefer, The Legends of the Rhine from Basle to Rotterdam, tr. by L. W. Garnham, B.A. (Mayence, 2d ed., 1869).
 30. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 264.
 31. Cf. ibid., 267 ff.; E. Marlitt, Das Geheimnis der alten Mamsell (Leipzig, 1867-68).
 32. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 267 ff.
 33. Ibid., IX, 144 f.
 34. Ibid., 189 ff.
 35. Ibid., 81.
 36. See Note 26 supra.
 37. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 262.
 38. Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 623; cf. also Boyles, Germany and You, V, No. 3, p. 21; A. B. Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Notebook (New York and London, 1935), 138.
 39. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 267.
 40. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 336 f.
 41. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, IX, 84.
 42. Ibid.
 43. S.L.Clemens to Bayard Taylor, Dec. 14, 1878, Cornell University Library. The incident occurred about the beginning of August.
 44. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, IX, 143.
 45. S. L. Clemens to Mrs. Clemens, in Heidelberg; Allerheiligen, Aug. 5, 1878, Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 333.
 46. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 33 f.
 47. Ibid., 263.

48. Ibid., IX, 63.
49. Ibid., 67.
50. Ibid., 106.
51. See Note 26 supra.
52. S. L. Clemens to Mrs. Jane Clemens and Mrs. Moffett in America; Munich, Dec. 1, 1878, Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 343 f.
53. See Note 26 supra.
54. A Tramp Abroad, Appendix F.
55. Life on the Mississippi, Mark Twain's Works, XII, 263.
56. Ibid., 265.
57. See Note 26 supra.
58. S. L. Clemens to J. H. Twichell, in Hartford; Munich, Jan. 26, 1879, Mark Twain's Works, XXXIV, 347 ff. See Leo von Hübner, "Mark Twain und die deutsche Sprache," Anglia, LXV (1941), 206-13.
59. Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, 74.
60. Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain, 179.
61. Cf. Aron, Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, 75; Mark Twain's Works, XXXI, 775 f. This was in 1884, See also XXXIV, 360.
62. Atlantic Monthly, XLVI (1880), 380-84; cf. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIII, 1678.
63. Mark Twain's Works, XII, 249.
64. April 8 and Aug. 21, 1884, Mark Twain's Works, XXXV, 442 and 444.
65. Ibid., XXXI, 823 f.
66. Ibid., XXXVII, 167.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 168 f. Cf. also Note 15 supra.
69. Cf. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIII, 1679; XXXI, 822. See also Aron, Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, 75.
70. Mark Twain's Works, XIV, 204, 214 f.
71. Aron, Monatshefte für deutsche Sprache und Pädagogik, 75.
72. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 846 ff.
73. Ibid., 848 f.; Cyril Clemens, Mark Twain the Letter Writer (Boston, 1932), 487.
74. Century Magazine, XXV (1888), 457 ff.
75. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 849.
76. Ibid.
77. Sprechen Sie Deutsch? (Meisterschaft Publishing Co.; Boston, 1881-83?). Cf. Twain's introductory note to his comedy.
78. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 848. Further identification of Prof. Schleutter is not revealed.
79. Following the Equator, Mark Twain's Works, XXI, 207.
80. Twain must be referring to Theodor Uhlig (1822-1859), an admirer and close friend of Richard Wagner and a contributor to Kolatschek's Deutsche Monatshefte für Politik, Wissenschaft, Kunst und Leben (Bremen, 1850-51).
81. "At the Shrine of St. Wagner," What is Man? and Other Essays, Mark Twain's Works, XXVI, 216 (see also Note 5 supra).
82. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain (New York, 1931), 92.
83. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 939.
84. Schulgesetzentwurf? Cf. Boyles, Germany and You, V, No. 3, p. 23; also Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Notebook, 222, 224.
85. Europe and Elsewhere, Mark Twain's Works, XXIX, 186 ff.
86. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 939.
87. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 56.

88. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 939. This translation was published in [August] November, 1935, by Harper & Brothers, Slovenly Peter or Happy Tales and Funny Pictures Freely Translated [into English Jingles] by Mark Twain, with Dr. Hoffmann's Illustrations, adapted from the rare first-edition, by Fritz Kredel. This rendering is so free that it offers no basis for an opinion of Mark's ability as a translator. At times it seems to be a translation of the illustrations rather than of the text. More rarely the accuracy and excellence of the rendering of the text are striking (cf., e.g., p. 6, lines 1-6; p. 1; p. 8, lines 1-2). In general, the mercurial Mark seems to have been unable to restrain an impulse to be funnier than the original. Accordingly, it is patent that although the first couplet of each story is, as a rule, a real translation of the original, the remainder of the story diverges from the German and is characterized by padding (cf., e.g., pp. 5, 14, 18 f.), approximation, and more or less free invention justified, if at all, only by suggestions offered by the accompanying illustrations.
89. Mark Twain's Works, XXXIII, 1431.
90. Ibid., XX, 128.
91. Ibid., XXXII, 941.
92. Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain, 178 f.
93. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1045.
94. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 191 f.
95. S. L. Clemens to Reverend J. H. Twichell, in Hartford; Vienna, Oct. 23, 1897, Mark Twain's Works, XXXV, 647.
96. S. L. Clemens to Mr. Rogers, in New York; March 24, 1898, ibid., 660.
97. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 203.
98. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1061; see also XXXV, 657 f.
99. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 208.
100. Mark Twain's Speeches, introduction by W. D. Howells (New York and London, 1910), 55. Hereinafter cited as Speeches.
101. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 213.
102. Ibid., 206.
103. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1078.
104. Ibid.
105. See Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain, 173 f.
106. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1075. Cf. also Cyril Clemens, Mark Twain The Letter Writer, 72 ff. The author says: "As far as I know this is the only letter the humorist ever wrote in that language." (Cf. pp. 2 ff. supra.)
- The letter, as printed on page 75, does great injustice to Mark Twain's German. A correct printing based on the facsimile is herewith appended:

Tuesday.

Dear Mr. Schlesinger:

Gut! Also werde/ ich Sie am 3^{ten} Feb/ ruar expect. Es freut/ mich sehr dass Sie/ unseres heiliges Werkes/ schon so weit gebracht/ habe. [Dieses is mein/ eigenes Grammatik/ --Kommt nicht aus/ des Buches]

Sincerely yours

S. L. Clemens

107. The date given in Speeches, 42 ff., is incorrect. Cf. Neue Freie Presse (Wien), Nov. 2, 1897, p. 1.
108. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1049.
109. Speeches, p. 42.
110. If the speech was impromptu, whence the copy on which the printed form

is based?

111. Clara Clémens, My Father Mark Twain, 194.
112. Morgenblatt, Nov. 2, 1897.
113. Cf. his intended speech to Franz Josef.
114. Cf., e.g., Mark Twain's Works, XXXVII, 89, Feb. 9, 1906.
115. See Note 111 supra.
116. See Note 108 supra.
117. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1071.
118. Ibid., 1074 f.
119. Ibid., 1075.
120. "About Play-Acting," Mark Twain's Works, XXXIII, 222. First published in the Forum, XXVI (1898), 143-51.
121. See Note 4 supra.
122. See Note 45 supra.
123. Cf. Schönemann, Mark Twain als Literarische Persönlichkeit, 38.
124. What is Man? and Other Essays, Mark Twain's Works, XXVI, 180 f.; XXXII, 1070 f. gives date of composition.
125. See Note 4 supra. Cf. also Edgar H. Hemminghaus, "Mark Twain's German Provenience," Modern Language Quarterly, VI (1945), 6, 459 ff.
126. Mark Twain's Works, XXXV, 678; XXXII, 1080.
127. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1083.
128. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 269.
129. Mark Twain's Works, XXV, 3 f.
130. Cf., e.g., Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1082, 1216 f.
131. Ibid., 1156.
132. Mark Twain's Works, XXVIII, 247.
133. North American Review, CLXXIV (1902), 433-444.
134. Mark Twain's Works, XXIV, 331 f.
135. Cf. Clara Clemens, My Father Mark Twain, 271, 272 (1907); 288 (1909).
136. Mark Twain's Works, XXXII, 1223.
137. Ibid., XXXVII, 169.
138. See Note 16 supra.
139. Ibid.
140. What is Man? and Other Essays, Mark Twain's Works, XXVI, 288.
141. A Tramp Abroad, Mark Twain's Works, X, 277 f.; Connecticut Yankee, ibid., XIV, 214 f.
142. "Mark Twain in Deutschland," Gegenwart (Berlin), LII (1899), No. 24, p. 376 f.
143. Mark Twain's Works, XXXVI, 165 f.
144. Speeches, 55 f.

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